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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: poverty eradication

Statement submitted by Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd and UNANIMA International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

Poverty: a social problem of gendered relations

Poverty eradication is an unparalleled challenge facing Member States and the global community. As non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working with women and girls in over 75 countries, we see first-hand the consequences of poverty, in particular the gender dimension. The *Report on the World Social Situation 2011: The Global Social Crisis* states that the global economic downturn has wide-ranging negative social outcomes for individuals, families, communities and societies, including an increase in gender-based violence. A study by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund indicates a widening gap between boys and girls, supporting the often-made claim that intrahousehold resource allocation favours boys over girls when resources are scarce. Good Shepherd and UNANIMA International deem that the existence of poverty within our global society is morally unacceptable and a violation of human rights.

Poverty is not the result of scarcity, but of inequality, especially gender inequality. We see the increased "feminization of poverty" bringing with it greater risks of human trafficking and the lack of, or poor access to, food, sanitation, water, health and education. The burden of chronic poverty is a burden borne primarily by women and girls. It is more than recognition that increasing numbers of women and girls are living in poverty — it is a social problem of gendered relations, patriarchy and discrimination. It is embedded in unjust structures and witnessed in inequality of access to public services, barriers to education, lack of specialized health care, labour market inequalities, wage discrimination, legal and cultural constraints in public and private life, denial of property rights and land tenure policies — all directed towards women and girls.

Women and girls have the power to transform rural economies

Women and girls are key in addressing the problems of the current global situation, with the food, energy, climate and financial crises requiring Governments to refocus their agricultural and economic growth policies. On 25 October 2011, in her statement to the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly, the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights noted that often poverty is the result of wrong policy choices by State authorities and other powerful economic entities. This is explained in the *Report on the World Social Situation 2011*, noting that the emergence of global food supply chains has weakened commitment to national and local food security. A new proposal for the future suggests that countries experiencing high levels of poverty need to focus on producing their own food, leading to food security and sustainability, and avoid becoming overly dependent on international markets. Since food security is a priority, the report suggests that a mix of agricultural and rural development policies is necessary. Women and girls already play a key role in family farming. If these same women and girls are given the right to land tenure, provided access to education and economically empowered, they are strategically positioned to take up this challenge of food security while addressing rural aspects of the climate and energy crises.

It is estimated that global food production will need to increase by 70 per cent by 2050 to meet growing demand. Girls are the backbone of rural work in the house and on the farm. Developing their capacities to be key players in agricultural

production is critical for positive sustainable solutions. Women farmers, in particular, have enormous untapped productive capacity that could be transformative if they are reached as adolescent girls with more education, skills training and appreciation of their role and capabilities. Girls living in rural economies have the potential to become agents of social and economic change.

This is not a new concept. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has noted that women rarely have formal title to agricultural land and therefore are deprived of asset-based security. Impoverished rural women face multiple disadvantages. They are also the ones who, if provided with opportunities, are best placed to bring about poverty eradication. The World Bank has said that microfinance enables poor women to become economic agents of change by increasing their income, productivity, access to markets and information and decision-making power.

According to the Center for Global Development, women and girls born into and living in chronic poverty do not just need good policies, they need societies that give them a voice and facilitate their rights. In framing public policies that are inclusive, gender-sensitive and participatory, attention must be given to societal attitudes, including patriarchal structures that undermine the efforts of women and girls. The rights and well-being of women and girls are critical to the well-being of their societies. Investments in women and girls are investments for a better future.

Implement the Social Protection Floor Initiative and put women and girls at the centre

The responsibility for addressing the multidimensional aspects of poverty lies at the national level. Poverty eradication requires effective partnerships that challenge and transform not only economic systems, but social, cultural and political structures that have given rise to and maintain current inequalities. Analysis by the University of Manchester, the Institute for Development Policy and the Brooks World Poverty Institute indicates that effective poverty eradication can take place at the national and local level with the genuine participation of people living in poverty. There is growing recognition that reducing poverty and promoting more equitable development could be achieved through social protection. The social protection floor, as defined by the International Labour Organization, is a nationally defined strategy to protect a minimum level of access to essential services and income security for all. Implementation of a social protection floor, incorporating gender mainstreaming criteria, will reduce poverty and empower women and girls. The implementation of the social protection floor for all, presented as the emerging theme at the forty-ninth session of the Commission for Social Development, is beginning to take hold. Implementation is one very positive way to empower women and girls, while at the same time fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals. Rights-based interventions that empower through education, training, decent work and full employment of women and girls living in poverty are critical and will be afforded through implementation of the Social Protection Floor Initiative.

The implementation of a social protection floor lays the foundation to move from current high levels of poverty and growing inequality to dignity and equity for all. The provision of water, sanitation, education, health care and a basic income, coupled with developing rural infrastructure and nationally owned agricultural policies ensuring food security for citizens, will enhance people's well-being. Girls

and women are key to such changes. The political will to implement change will generate a new consciousness towards equity, sustainability and the well-being of all citizens.

Recommendations

Address systemic and policy issues that create and perpetuate growing inequality, food insecurity and poverty through:

(a) Upholding a human rights-based approach and eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against girls and women;

(b) Providing safe spaces for girls:

- Challenge patriarchal dominance and bring perpetrators of violence to justice;
- Facilitate girls' participation at all levels of decision-making;
- Count girls — birth registration and disaggregated data;
- Measure progress;

(c) Implementing the Social Protection Floor Initiative by:

- Providing quality education for rural girls and women at secondary and tertiary level;
- Providing comprehensive rural health care, information and services;
- Training rural girls to be major stakeholders, entrepreneurs, workers and managers in the rural economy.

The experience of Good Shepherd and UNANIMA International in the field is one of having helped thousands of individual women and girls out of chronic poverty through a wide variety of education, training and microfinance programmes. The time has come to have systemic and structural change. The President of the General Assembly stated on 15 October 2011, International Day of Rural Women, that "prioritizing gender equality and women's empowerment is one of the United Nations fundamental objectives". Is it your national objective?

Note: The statement is endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council: Dominican Leadership Conference, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Pax Christi International.